

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 21 September 2020 at 6.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Fraser Massey (Chair), Gerard Rice (Deputy Chair), Luke Spillman, Sara Muldowney and Sue Shinnick
- Laura Blake, Thames Crossing Action Group Representative
Westley Mercer, Thurrock Business Board Representative
Robert Quick, Resident Representative
- Gary Hodge, Highways England Representative
Gareth Protheroe, Highways England Representative
Sam Stopp, Highways England Representative
- Apologies:** Councillors John Allen, Andrew Jefferies
Peter Ward, Business Representative
- In attendance:** Anna Eastgate, Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Transport Infrastructure Projects
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer
-

Before the start of the meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being live streamed and recorded, with the video recording to be made available on the Council's YouTube channel.

11. Apologies for Absence

The Chair stated that Councillor Allen had sent his apologies, but due to a bad traffic accident on Dock Approach Road other Councillors and co-opted members may also be delayed or not in attendance.

12. Minutes

The minutes from Lower Thames Crossing Taskforce held on 20 July 2020 were approved as a true and correct record.

13. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

14. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

15. Highways England Attendance

Mr Protheroe, the Highways England (HE) Representative began his presentation and thanked the Task Force for inviting HE to the meeting, as he felt it was a good opportunity to hear feedback and concerns. He began by outlining the Development Consent Order (DCO) process and confirmed that HE were intent on submitting the DCO by the end of October. He added that the team were currently reviewing results from the design refinement consultation, which they would need to complete first before they could submit DCO. He explained that once the DCO was submitted the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) had 28 days to review and consider if the submission met the required government standard. He explained that if the submission did meet that standard then the next stage would be the pre-examination and examination phases, during which key stakeholders would be able to challenge HE on the scheme and HE would have to explain how the scheme was developed. He stated that HE, at this phase, would set out the necessary impact assessments, including for both construction and route operation. He added that after the examination phase, PINS would make its recommendation regarding the route to the Minister, for him to make the final decision. He mentioned that legal challenges could then be submitted after the Minister's decision announcement.

Mr Protheroe moved on to outline the key factors included in the design refinement consultation, which included a reduction in the size of the development boundary, minor highway design changes, alignment changes and bridge changes. He added that the consultation also included more detailed information regarding how the design of the route would impact non-motorised users, including horse riders. He stated that utility diversions had also been changed in the design refinement consultation, as the utilities companies had worked to provide more finalised studies of their sites. He commented that the consultation also included more developed landscape proposals, as well as some ecological mitigation. Mr Protheroe described how the COVID pandemic had impacted the consultation as no in-person events could be held, and the majority of the deposit locations had closed, so the team had followed a 'digital first' approach which did include some telephone and postal consultation. He stated that HE had worked hard to continue their consultation whilst following government guidelines, and the digital first approach had worked as the number of website hits had increased.

Mr Protheroe then explained how the development boundary had changed at design refinement consultation as 45% less houses were affected, a drop from 270 to 150 properties, and 12.5% less land was needed which equated to 26.2km². He added that the number of overhead lines needing to be moved had also decreased, and noise barriers were being designed to mitigate some of the noise from the road, and highlighted that these were being developed, including their height and location, by HE contractors, although they had to meet HE standards. He stated that some of the barriers would be made from wood, but others would be made from newer materials such as recycled plastics, or earth bunds. Mr Protheroe then explained in detail the locations of the noise barriers, such as in Tilbury, the junction with the A13 and Ockendon. Mr Protheroe then explained in detail the location and height of false cutting and earth bunds, such as in Chadwell St Mary and

South Ockendon. He then explained the locations of construction compounds, including the Lakeside compound, and described how these had not been moved since statutory consultation, but had been reshaped to avoid an archaeological site. He then described and summarised the feedback from the supplementary consultation and design refinement consultation. He stated that some of the concerns from the supplementary consultation had been reiterated at design refinement, including lack of technical engagement, problems with the emerging Local Plan, design quality and safety. He highlighted specific comments made at consultation such as the environmental impact of each change, the need for detailed mitigation information, and design refinements for non-motorised users.

The Chair thanked HE for their presentation and began the debate. Councillor Shinnick questioned the size of the proposed traveller's site and asked if it would house more travellers. Mr Protheroe responded that the residential location was bigger as more land was required for environmental mitigation, but the number of people living there would not increase as there would still be 21 pitches. The Assistant Director LTC added that the footprint of the traveller's site also needed to increase to meet current fire safety requirements. Councillor Muldowney then questioned the feedback from the design refinement consultation on the location of the proposed traveller's site. Mr Protheroe responded that the team were currently working through consultation responses, so no detailed data was currently available.

The Resident Representative questioned why the noise barriers would be made of wood or other similar materials, when there was more modern sound absorbing material available. He also questioned what the statutory requirements were for noise reductions and mitigation. Mr Protheroe responded that lots of material was assessed for noise reduction abilities, but HE's contractor would have to adhere to standards set out in the Environmental Statement. He added that noise barriers were designed to reflect rather than absorb noise, and surveys would be carried out to ensure that all noise barriers met the required standard. Mr Protheroe added that monitoring would be undertaken both during construction and once the route was opened to show their effectiveness, and wooden noise barriers were a well-established means of noise reduction. The Resident Representative queried if HE had taken into account the maintenance of the noise barriers. Mr Protheroe stated that any false cutting or planting would not be right up to the noise barrier to ensure that proper maintenance could be undertaken. Councillor Muldowney queried how building a 6m high noise barrier would affect residents who lived near them. Mr Protheroe replied that the barriers would provide necessary noise protection, but the visual impact would be assessed in the Environmental Statement. He added that some of the noise barriers would be large structures, and it would depend on the outlook of the house on how much impact they would cause.

The Thames Crossing Action Group (TCAG) Representative queried map book three of the design refinement consultation documents and asked for an explanation regarding the removal of the false cutting, to which Mr Protheroe replied that he did not have the detail but would respond to the query via

email. The TCAG Representative then questioned the effectiveness of the noise barriers. Mr Protheroe responded that HE created noise surveys and models, which reported what the noise pollution would be without any mitigation, and with the proposed mitigation to show the effectiveness. He stated that the level of noise decreased quickly the further you were from the route, but clarified that the Environmental Statement would provide a full report.

Councillor Rice stated that the route came very near to houses on Brentwood Road and asked if the route could be moved further west, away from centres of population, which would reduce the nuisance for residents and the need for noise barriers. Mr Protheroe responded that the final location of the scheme was still being developed and lots of work would be undertaken at DCO submission and examination. He added that HE would have to prove that the scheme was appropriate at DCO and examination. The Assistant Director LTC added that as the route was nearing DCO submission, the ability to change or move the scheme was slim. Councillor Spillman stated that the UK and Thurrock were currently experiencing a bio-diversity crisis and asked how HE would measure the impact of the scheme on bio-diversity across the borough, and what mitigation or projects could be added to improve bio-diversity. Mr Protheroe replied that the impact on bio-diversity would be reported in the Environmental Statement and follow HE's design manual for roads and bridges, which included desktop and physical surveys to understand bio-diversity and the impact on flora, fauna and ecology. He added that any mitigation and species translocation would be included in the Environmental Masterplan, and final bio-diversity calculations had not yet been finalised. He stated that it would be difficult for a new scheme such as this to have a net positive bio-diversity outcome on site, without the use of bio-diversity credits away from site, but HE were currently working on different proposals and mitigation measures. The Assistant Director LTC added that HE only had to mitigate significant loss of bio-diversity.

The Chair questioned the number of DCO's currently being submitted such as Bradwell 2 and the new theme park in Kent, and queried whether or not there would be enough construction workers in the area to fulfil the requirements of all three projects, if they were successful. Mr Protheroe responded that HE had recognised the potential risks and issues with numerous major schemes being constructed at the same time. He stated that ideally HE wanted to draw as many local labourers into the scheme, and that HE had been working with SME's to align them with the scheme and maximise the likelihood of gain for the local community. The Chair then asked how, if HE had to bring in external construction workers, these would be managed and housed, and how HE would ensure they did not impact upon local residents. Mr Protheroe stated HE were currently assessing the location of the main works compound and how construction workers would access these sites. He stated this would be communicated through the Construction Code of Practice and outlined in the DCO. He stated that as some parts of the construction would be operating 24 hours a day, some construction workers would need to live on site. The Assistant Director LTC added that the Council were not supportive of temporary mobile homes for construction workers across the borough, and felt

that external workers might have an impact on the ability of local residents to access services such as temporary accommodation. She added that Thurrock were trying to promote green travel, for example using the new Stanford-le-Hope station as a transport hub, so workers from London and Southend could be bussed directly from the station to the site.

Councillor Muldowney questioned the effectiveness of the air and noise pollution modelling, and whether or not any more modelling would be taking place. Mr Protheroe responded that air quality and noise modelling had been created by using the traffic model, which now used phone data to understand traffic patterns. Mr Protheroe confirmed that traffic modelling had previously used postcard and survey data, but current traffic modelling provided more robust data. He explained that HE also used webtag guidance on air quality, and this would be based on traffic flow modelling, which had not yet been completed. He added that when the Environmental Statement was published it would include the methodology of the traffic modelling, and this would be in accordance with government guidance. Councillor Muldowney questioned when the traffic model had been updated. The Assistant Director LTC responded that the traffic model had been recently updated and the cordoned model had been shared with the Council. She added that air quality near the proposed route would deteriorate in some areas, but would not be allowed to deteriorate beyond government limits. She mentioned that the Council would be monitoring and measuring air quality during the routes construction and once it had been opened, as modelling could not accurately predict traffic patterns. She commented that as the route was due to open in 2027/28 the hope was that the number of green vehicles would have increased, although the Council were concerned regarding the number of HGVs which would be using the route, due to the three international ports.

Councillor Spillman stated that due to the COVID pandemic the number of car journeys being made had significantly reduced, and whether this would influence the scheme. He also asked if COVID would influence the cost-benefit ratio of the scheme. Mr Protheroe stated that the traffic model had not included COVID, but agreed that the amount of traffic had decreased during the pandemic, although the longer term effects of COVID on traffic was not yet known. He added that any clarification regarding the impacts of COVID would be discussed during the examination phase.

The Resident Representative questioned the benefit-cost ratio of the scheme. Mr Protheroe responded that the benefits of the scheme would be shared at Council and ward level once the DCO had been submitted. He stated that one of the local benefits would be the local construction workers who would be used for the scheme, which would increase capital in the local economy, and added that the scheme would also improve congestion on the local road network due to the decrease in congestion at the Dartford Crossing. Mr Protheroe added that the DCO would outline current cost estimates and any economic benefit would be outlined in the Economic Assessment Report. The TCAG Representative asked for information on the Mardyke Viaduct, as no visual designs had been released. The Assistant Director LTC stated that the designs had been shared in the design consultation, but the structure had

changed to two, short viaducts with an earthwork embankment as separation. Mr Hodge stated that the viaduct would be 11.5metres high, with ground level at 3.5metres high, giving 8metres clearance for pedestrians and non-motorised users. He added that the two viaducts would be 50metres in length with an embankment in between, and this was outlined in map book three on sheet 15. He stated that the reduction in height was due to a number of factors including commercial pressures and budgetary constraints. Mr Hodge added flooding had been considered, as well as the overall benefit the viaduct would provide for the scheme.

Councillor Muldowney queried the number of apprenticeships that would be provided by the scheme, and whether HE could provide an update. She added that there was currently 12% youth employment, which could rise due to the COVID pandemic, and whether HE were working to improve training opportunities. Mr Protheroe replied that lots of work was being undertaken and meetings were taking place between HE and local SMEs, and the IT model that had been used during the Olympics was being adopted to get main works contractor's connections. He added that the government had set a 5% target on apprenticeships which HE would meet and were planning to exceed.

16. Task Force Priorities List

The Assistant Director LTC stated that the priorities list would be soon superseded by the mitigation list, which would be presented to the Task Force at the next meeting.

17. Work Programme

The Assistant Director LTC stated that officers would not have a lot of time in November to attend the meeting as the DCO was due to be submitted in late October, and officers would be focussed on reviewing the 60,000 pages of the submission. She asked the Chair if a discussion could be had at October's meeting regarding the cancellation of November's Task Force, to which the Chair agreed.

The meeting finished at 7.56 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**

This page is intentionally left blank